



amnesty international news release

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Amnesty International calls for human rights safeguards after police torture and killings in Nepal

Amnesty International has called on the Nepali government to introduce human rights safeguards to prevent a recurrence of the large scale violations that took place during demonstrations for political reforms earlier this year.

Thousands of people were arrested for peacefully taking part in the demonstrations and torture by police was widespread. A number of the people killed during the protests may have been victims of extrajudicial executions by the police, who used excessive force in controlling the crowds.

The worldwide human rights organization said the government, which has committed itself to protect human rights, should prohibit torture, punish those who use it, and change the law to prevent arbitrary arrest.

An Amnesty International delegation that visited the country in April found that torture, particularly beating, was routine in police detention during the time of political unrest. Torture is not specifically prohibited in Nepali law. Most of the torture took place in police detention, when the detainees had no contact with lawyers or family.

The thousands of people arrested during the demonstrations, many of them prisoners of conscience, were held in overcrowded conditions, frequently in makeshift detention centres. There were often no official records of their arrest or place of detention, a long-standing problem in Nepal which increases the chances of prisoners "disappearing" in the system. In some cases, the authorities flatly refused detainees' requests to notify their relatives.

A number of the people killed during the demonstrations may have been victims of extrajudicial executions. The police shot some demonstrators in the head or chest, apparently in violation of Nepali rules for crowd control which call for lethal force to be used only as a last resort and then for shots to be fired below the knee. Police officers also repeatedly obstructed doctors trying to help the victims.

Amnesty International said steps the government should take to end torture, arbitrary detention and extrajudicial killings both in law and in practice include ending incommunicado detention, prohibiting torture and prosecuting those who commit extrajudicial executions.

Since April 6, most uncharged political prisoners have been released. Exceptions include several convicted criminal offenders, who may not have received fair trials and should be retried, and several Christians sentenced to between one and six years' imprisonment for conversion or proselytization, who should be unconditionally released, Amnesty International said.

The organization also said that, in order to ensure that the commission set up to investigate killings since mid-February is effective, the government should issue guidelines for such inquiries, including provisions for protecting witnesses and conducting adequate autopsies.

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